

Writing an Effective Grant Proposal

Nancy L. Withbroe, CFRE

Presented at the “*America Supports You*”
National Summit, U.S. Dept of Defense
January 25, 2008

We Will Cover

- The ideal structure
- Putting it together
- Other proposal formats
- Questions & answers

The Ideal Structure

Telling your story

Proposal Narrative Components

- Statement of need
- Project plan
 - Goals and objectives
 - Activities and timeline
 - Evaluation plan
 - Budget
- Background on your organization
- Conclusion

Mindset – Think Like the Funder, Not Like Your Organization

- What does the funder want? – not – what does your organization want to deliver?
- What language does the funder understand and appreciate? – not – are these the terms we are accustomed to using?
- Give the reader hope

Example

“OIF/OEF vets are likely to be suffering from PTSD and TBI, and unable to maintain pre-service interactions with their dependents.”

Make Your Proposal Tell A Story

- State the need
 - “This group knows what they are talking about.”
- Identify the solution you offer
 - “Gee, that could really make a difference.”
- Present your plan
 - “OK, I see what we need to do”
- Back up with details
 - “That makes me confident they can really do it”

State the Need

- What problem in the community does your organization/ project address? – not – what problem does your organization have?
 - Identify the target population.
 - Use local statistics for local projects.
 - Tell a story about a person.
 - Who else is working on this problem, and where are the gaps?
- Speak the funder's language.

Identify Your Solution - Project Goal

- How will you approach the need?
- What is your goal?
 - General statement regarding how target population will change as result of your project
- What difference will you make as a result of this work?

Present Your Plan - Project Activities and Timeline

- Put milestone dates in place for each project activity
- Divide long tasks into shorter segments with milestones
- Check to ensure that long time intervals are well explained and understandable
- Don't promise more than you can deliver

Present Your Plan - Staffing, Partners, Budget

- What resources do you need to fulfill your plan?
 - Staff/volunteers
 - Partner organizations
 - Facilities
 - In-kind donations
 - Cash
- Balance expenses and income

Present Your Plan – Evaluation and Expected Outcomes

- What outcomes – changes in the target population – will result?
- How will you know if these outcomes were achieved - what measurement tools will you use?
- This becomes your outline for reports if the grant is funded
- Donors give to the future, not the past

Introduce Your Organization

- Who are you?
- Why are you the best organization to address this need in this particular way?
 - Track record
 - Proven staff and volunteer leadership
 - Independent testimonials
 - Clients
 - Subject matter experts
 - Partner organizations

Conclusion

- Ask for a specific amount within a specific time frame
- Remind the reader of the need and your solution
- Mention recognition opportunities, if appropriate
- Inspire the reader

Putting It Together

Pay attention to your package

First Impressions Are Important

- Appear professional, polished, but modest
- Pay attention to requirements for margins, binders, number of pages, font size, etc.
- Most funders prefer simply packaged, unbound proposals on white, 8 ½" x 11" paper.

Cover Letter or Cover Email

- NEVER “To whom it may concern”
- Summarize request
- Reference conversations you have had with staff or board members about the proposal
- Thank funder for past support, if relevant
- Offer to set up meeting or call to discuss
- Signed by Executive Director and sometimes by Board President

Executive Summary

- It's the most important piece, because...
 - It's the only piece everyone reads
 - It's the first piece everyone reads
 - For some, it's the only piece they read
- Write it FIRST and LAST
- If the funder requires an application form, use that instead

Attachments

- Put in same order as RFP/ guidelines
- Less is more
 - 501(c)3 letter
 - Board list
 - Key staff resumes or brief bios
 - 1 pg org. budget
 - 1 pg. project budget
 - Audited financials
 - Annual report
 - 1-2 current media reports about your organization
 - 1-2 letters of support

Other Formats

Telling your story ...
how the funder wants to hear it

Other Formats

- Request for Proposal
- Letter Proposal/ Letter of Inquiry
- Online Applications

Request for Proposal (“RFP”)

- RFP can be formal, semi-formal (guidelines) or totally informal (verbal)
- Use the RFP as your guide for what to say and in what order
 - Use their numbering system, format, and naming conventions
 - Answer EVERYTHING
- Put additional information in attachments

Letter Proposals

- Letter of Inquiry/Introduction (“LOI”) may be required first step, or your only chance
 - Follow their directions, if provided
 - If not, use short version of ideal flow (need, organization info, project plan, budget)
 - Ask for permission to submit full proposal
- Focus on essentials
- Three pages MAX

Online Applications

- Increasingly common
- Prepare your answers in a Word document, then cut and paste
- Watch word limits
- Don't wait until the last minute



Don't Forget the Basics

Don't do anything stupid

Don't Forget the Basics

- Meet the deadline – no exceptions!
- Follow directions
- Review for consistency, content and presentation
- Ask an outsider to review it – listen to them
- Keep it short and simple

Develop a Relationship

- People give money to people -- organizations don't give money to organizations
- Board to board, staff to staff
- Build trust over time
- It make take 2-3 years to get the grant you want

Where to Learn More

Resources

Where to Learn More

- Foundation Center (www.fdncenter.org)
- Charity Channel (www.charitychannel.com)
- State and regional associations of nonprofits
- Association of Fundraising Professionals (www.afpnet.org)

Questions and Answers

Everyone

Contact Information

Nancy L. Withbroe, CFRE
Manager of Consulting Services
CDR Fundraising Group
(301) 858-1500, x2202
nwithbroe@cdrfg.com
www.cdrfg.com